7 2

Florence. 31 March 1830.

My dear Dilke,

You have wounded me to the quick. I could not have believed that any one I am acquainted with, far less you, would treat me, both in matter and manner, with such injustice. To make these words good, I must use many more.

When you sent me George's defence, you told me it was quite conclusive, in your judgment, and in that of others that had read it, to prove the "positive fallacy of the cruel charge against him." You, and certainly most of the others that had read it, knew that I had promulgated this cruel charge. Add to which, in that defence the impossibility of my having heard such a charge from John Keats was urged as far as the nature of the subject would admit. I therefore stood convicted, by you and others, of having made a cruel charge against a man, of the fallacy of which you and those others were convinced, while, possibly, some suspected I never had grounds for making it. You requested me to convey the spirit of the defence to Mr. Hunt and any other likely to have heard of the charge. I could not believe in it, but, having no evidence in contradiction, I was compelled to accede, and make the defence, fully and faithfully, known to Mr. Hunt, and four others in Italy, of which I took care to inform you. Though my case was a hard one, and though the defence rested on nothing but mere assertion, I was convinced of the goodness of your motives.

After wearing this stain on my character for more than five years, documents come into my hands by which I am enabled to prove that, root and branch, every little of George's defence is false. I do so, saying it is a most unpleasant and disgusting office to me, but necessary, and send the letter to you, requesting you will show it to Marcus and Miss Brawne, and to any others who may have entertained thoughts prejudicial to my character, as one guilty of having spoken indirectly against another. What is your answer? You say it is "unintelligible", (assuming that I had given no reason for it, though it stared you in the face,) that I should "inflict" an unpleasant letter on you, "marked for, unnecessary," stirring up your "gall and bitterness with facts and figures". This implies I had no right to send you such a letter; — I had. You made yourself an agent between George's character and mine; you forwarded his defence to me; I had a right to forward my defence to you in return; and more, — you were bound to act in the same manner, at my request, towards me, as I was bound, at your request, to act towards you. Instead of this, you say not one word of your agreeing to state to those, who were convinced of the fallacy of my cruel charge, the grounds of my defence; you content yourself with telling me you will show my letter to Marcus, when you see him, letting me know, on another page, that you have not seen him these six months, and that you suppose it out of all possibility that he should call on you. Now I request you will send it to him by the post, or back again to me. In respect to your not showing it to Miss Brawne, your reason is good; provided neither you, nor your wife, gave George's defence to her, or offered it, or spoke of it to her, — otherwise you are unjust. When George's character was to be made fair, backed by mere assertions,

it did not appear that mine ever entered into your head, – all was tenderness for him; when mine was to be made fair, backed by incontrovertible documents, nothing but George's character is spoken of, – all is anger at me. You set yourself up as umpire, – act uprightly! George's facts, dates, and figures, without a document, were all in all sufficient, convincing to all; mine, with documents, are "ingenious, quite conclusive to those who do not know they are erroneous, – to me" (you go on) "they only prove how ingeniously a man may satisfy himself that error is truth, and confirm an old opinion, not of mine, but of most people's, that to build up an error solidly, there is nothing like facts, dates, and figures." Why did you not apply this old opinion to George's defence? Considering you had been convinced by his unbacked facts, dates, and figures, would it not have been more to the purpose to pluck out the beam from any one of mine? You cannot do so, without doubting my word, which would be less offensive than disregarding it, because I can easily send you attested copies of these documents. How easy is it to speak positively! – how difficult, when that positiveness is called in question, by positive facts, dates, and figures, to do otherwise than meet! You care not, you say, one farthing what I believe of George; – or if you did, what then? – but you ought to be careful that the world, – our world, – believes nothing against me without reason. The hope you express, never once noticing my character, that you may hear nothing further on this subject, by no means strengthens my faith in your perfect knowledge of George's immaculateness. You have it in your power, you aver, to prove every thing in his favour, – do it then, and I will bow to him, however him, make him every amends in my power. I shall be rejoiced to find, by conclusive evidence, that my Keats's brother did not behave as I believe he did, that he did not borrow money without an acknowledgment, and then declare himself a creditor, – and that my Keats was not so weak and shallow as to accuse a brother of what he never committed; for this knowledge I would willingly sacrifice that part of my character, which you allow to be attacked, – I would confess myself indiscreet, defaming, – heinous, if any one insisted on the epithet; but it is monstrous to expect that I should forfeit one iota of my good name in order to uphold that of the swindler of my friend. Instead of telling me you care not what I believe of George, you might have said, I care not for you. Yet, even then, I should have answered, – Care for me or not, care for your own honour; you, the active party in declaring me guilty of having made a cruel charge against another, are bound to examine, carefully examine into every particle of evidence which I may produce in my favour. You have, virtually, accused me of defaming George; this you have done, publicly as you could, short of printing; be rational enough to examine if the accusation you have made is, or is not grounded on a mistake.

You seem to think I ought to rest content with your bare assertion against me. It is, however, impossible to put faith in your infallibility on this subject; for which I will give a few reasons. I was never aware of your being skilful in matters of account; and, judging from some self-convicting errors of account in George's defence, whether unperceived by you, or committed in your version of it, you are not skilful.